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ABSTRACT

This observation guide lists 270 separate items, in checklist format, to be used for informal evaluation of classroom teachers by their peers. Items for observation are given for mechanics of teaching, scholarship, organization, classroom relationships, and miscellaneous teaching functions, as well as for preparation, topic choice, quality of interaction, quality of content and discussion, and method and efficiency of question-asking on the part of the teacher. (LH)

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LOOKING FOR GOOD TEACHING: A GUIDE TO PEER OBSERVATION

Some of our potentially most valuable resources in seeking to improve our own teaching are colleagues who share similar goals and similar experiences to our own. Yet comments upon our teaching made by our peers often tend to focus on our mistakes and to consist of generalities that do not deal with behavior we can do anything about, so that rather than providing the guidance we had hoped for, they leave us feeling threatened, helpless, and discouraged.

This observation guide is intended to assist an observer in watching for certain kinds of behavior in order to help the teacher to build on strengths. It provides information for the teacher which is specific so that he receives some concrete information, selective so that he gets some guidance as to appropriate directions for change, and positive so that he gets some encouragement. The observer records actual examples to enable the teacher to use his own best practice as the standard to work toward. The information that comes from the checklist is intended only for the information and use of the teacher, not for evaluation of his performance.

The 270 items were drawn from 70 books and articles about good teaching and each represents a description of a recommended classroom practice. Since there are many kinds of good teaching, there are a wide variety of behaviors listed, including some which are contradictory, the choice depending on what the teacher is trying to do. The items themselves may become a source of ideas for the teacher, suggesting new or alternative teaching practices.

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Teaching through Presentation

Mechanics

___ Maintains eye contact
___ Moves about room
___ Pays attention to physical comfort and needs of the group (temperature; ability to see, hear; breaks, etc.)
___ Variety (change of pace, movement, gesture, variation in voice quality, use of silence. . .)
___ Varies activities over class period
___ Vocabulary comprehensible to students
___ Assists in mastering new vocabulary (defines, uses)
___ Uses illustrative materials or teaching aids
  ___ pictures, blackboard, slides, video, charts or diagrams, maps
  ___ stories, personal references, current events items
  ___ demonstrations, activities, games
  ___ examples, analogies
___ Has students' attention
___ Sensitive to response of class
  ___ Paces delivery to students' capacity to follow
  ___ Notices questions, volunteers
  ___ Makes allowance for note-taking
  ___ Anticipates slowness or difficulty in understanding
  ___ Notes and reacts to non-attending behavior, lack of interest, confusion, etc.
  ___ Determines if one student's problem is common to others
  ___ Checks comprehension with specific questions before moving on
___ Begins and ends class on time

Scholarship

___ Includes factual knowledge
___ Includes fundamental principles, generalizations, theories
___ Includes applications for problem solving and decision-making
___ Indicates how knowledge is obtained
___ Relates content to skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in related fields
___ Shows relation of theory to practice
___ Discusses or contrasts more than one point of view
___ Suggests implications of an idea, position, or theory
___ Goes into detail, presents supporting evidence rather than just generalizations
___ Presents facts or concepts from related fields or relates topics to other areas of knowledge
___ Refers to recent developments in the field
___ Gives references for interesting or involved points
___ Presents origins of ideas and concepts
___ Distinguishes between fact and opinion, data and interpretation
___ Deals with controversial topics
___ Talks about research he has done himself
___ Emphasizes ways of solving problems rather than solutions

Teaching through Presentation - continued

Organization

Opening

___ States topics
___ Provides an overview of what is planned for the class period
___ Focuses student attention (by demonstration, activity, question, etc.) before launching into lecture proper
___ Presents broader framework within which day's topic can be placed and related
___ Relates to previous topic and ties in
___ States goals or objectives for class session
___ Starts slowly, allowing class to "warm up"

Structure and clarity

___ States and follows plan
___ Makes organization (chronological, cause-effect, problem solution, etc.) explicit (outline on board, handout, flow chart, diagram, etc.)
___ Presents material in several short blocks
___ Summarizes periodically
___ Indicates transitions
___ Emphasizes important points by incidental cues (voice, gesture, pauses, etc.), repeating key phrases, explicit statements ("This is important"), listing or elaboration (through detail, examples, analogies, rephrasing. . .)
___ Groups subordinate ideas under major ones
___ Points out relationships between ideas (i.e., uses specific linking words rather than "and")
___ Refers back to points made or terms used earlier
___ When comparing, makes basis of comparison clear
___ When evaluating, specifies criteria
___ Gives more than one example or application of a generalization, concept, or principle
___ Leaves some connections to be made

Closing

___ Social ("Have a good weekend")
___ Summarizes major points or sees that class does so
___ Draws conclusions
___ Establishes relationships
___ Integrates major points
___ Establishes links between familiar and new
___ Makes opportunities for questions (see also below)
___ Gives students a feeling of accomplishment
___ Looks forward to next topic or step
___ Indicates whether a topic will be returned to
___ Makes an assignment or suggests an activity which builds on day's topics, something to do or think about

Classroom relationships

___ Appears interested and enthusiastic
___ Interacts informally at beginning, end of class
___ Calls students by name
___ Shows knowledge of individual student's interests, talents, etc.

Teaching through Presentation - continued

___ Gives motivational cues: indicates important and difficult ideas
  ___ indicates certain topic will be examined
  ___ suggests that material is difficult but learnable
___ Relates goals and content to social context, course or personal goals
___ Includes material relevant to existing student interests
___ Prompts awareness of students' relevant knowledge or experience (gives or asks for examples, refers to prior learning, etc.)
___ Makes clear (demonstrates) his own way of considering ideas, attacking problems etc.
___ Refers to work students are doing outside of class
___ Uses humor
___ Departs from plan to pursue an idea of spontaneous interest
___ Requires or makes opportunities for students to process information being provided (from rhetorical questions to discussions, written assignments)
___ Admits he doesn't know or is wrong
___ Talks about why he does what he does in class
___ Informs students of coming campus events related to course
___ Seeks feedback on his own performance
___ Accepts student ideas and comments (by reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, encouraging, or praising)
___ Makes value implications explicit
___ Stresses aesthetic and emotional aspects of subject
___ Invites challenge
___ Indicates his availability for giving individual help
___ Suggests resources for students to explore independently
___ Shifts easily from presentation mode to questioning or discussion mode
___ Provides opportunities for and encourages audience participation and questions
  ___ Clarifies material when asked
  ___ Calls for questions in a way that does not embarrass or belittle the questioner
  ___ Allows time for the formulation of questions
  ___ Praises question asking, good questions
  ___ Clarifies thinking by identifying reasons for questions
  ___ Makes sure that comments or questions have been heard by all
  ___ Draws out implications of the question
  ___ Answers questions clearly and directly
  ___ Checks to see whether answer has been understood
  ___ Helps student answer his own question
  ___ Encourages students to answer peer questions
  ___ Relates student comments to one another
  ___ Invites students to share their knowledge and experience
  ___ Remembers and refers to student ideas
  ___ Interacts with students not physically nearest him
  ___ Asks follow-up questions
___ Uses student questions or comments to introduce new material

Other:

Teaching through Involvement

Mechanics

___ Group is of manageable size (15 or fewer)
___ Room arranged so all can see and hear one another
___ Eye contact indicates that responsibility is shared among members of the group
___ Calls students by name

Preparation

___ Establishes common ground prior to discussion
___ Has provided for input -- reading, TV or film viewing, observation, etc. -- prior to discussion
___ Uses specific means to insure that group members come prepared
___ Helps the group agree on definitions and assumptions
___ Allocates time for the various steps in the discussion
___ Uses specific means to involve students initially in the discussion
___ States objectives
___ Lets students know what will be expected of them in terms of participation
___ Sets a specific objective for the discussion (i.e., produce a list of pros and cons)

Conclusion

___ Draws together contributions of various members of the group
___ Allows time to consider implications of the content of the discussion outside the classroom
___ Requires the group to make a conscious effort to relate the discussion to ideas and concepts acquired in other meetings or other learning situations
___ Summarizes and draws new conceptualizations at end
___ Encourages students to conclude with a review including:
  ___ restatement of positions taken
  ___ checking if any positions have been modified and why
  ___ consideration of future action
___ Suggests a follow-up activity ("Watch for...", "Try this...") related to discussion

Choice of topic

___ Selects issues which are important and which students take seriously
___ Involves students in deciding what issues to discuss
___ Allows the group some choice in specific discussion content

Involving students

___ Uses questions to stimulate discussion
___ Prevents or terminates discussion monopolies
___ Makes opportunities (i.e., going around table) for all to participate
___ Seeks to involve individuals who are not participating

Teaching through Involvement - continued

___ Recognizes potential contributor and makes an opening for that person
___ Reinforces infrequent contributors
___ Assists a quiet student in "saying what he means"
___ Protects a quiet student from penalties for being wrong
___ Accepts silence

Quality of interaction

___ Intervenes when pauses become long, not to fill them but to find out why
___ Willing to abandon an exhausted topic
___ Listens
___ Reminds students to listen to one another
___ Shares his perception of group process or feeling
___ When discussion is not going well, stops to deal directly with group processes
___ Indicates that personal attacks are out of order
___ Helps student to accept correction or appropriate criticism
___ Calls attention to and rewards the playing of facilitative group roles
___ Encourages students to acknowledge comments of others by summarizing them
___ Relieves tension
___ Allows time for evaluation of the discussion itself

Quality and content of discussion

___ Sees that group reviews information from input material before going on to matters of opinion and judgment
___ Encourages feeling and opinion before moving to fact
___ Sees that errors of fact, logic, or relevance are corrected
___ Introduces relevant considerations that have been missed
___ Provides needed or relevant information (Contributes facts, needed information, or sees that they are contributed)
___ Questions misconceptions, faulty logic, unwarranted conclusions
___ Sees that the group questions the accuracy of statements, the relevance of example and analogy, the adequacy of logic
___ Distinguishes a value from a fact
___ Pursues student ideas when they are not clearly expressed
___ Requires student to defend his position, relate it to other ideas, or modify it
___ Points out areas of confusion
___ Intervenes when discussion gets off the track
___ Uses questions to guide discussion
___ Tolerates confusion and doubt while students search for a solution
___ Summarizes discussion periodically
___ Helps students remain aware of logical organization
___ Refers back to points made or terms used earlier in discussion

Teaching through Involvement - continued

Role of teacher

___ Shifts easily back and forth between presentation and discussion or questioning modes
___ Makes own role clear and sticks to it (i.e., moderator, resource person, etc.)
___ Delegates role of moderator
___ States the issue at the beginning, restates as needed
___ Resists the temptation to comment on each student's comment
___ Paraphrases student comments for his own or students' understanding
___ Uses non-verbal cues (looking, pointing, silence, facial expression) to direct the discussion without intruding
___ When necessary to intervene, does so briefly
___ Uses strategy on distractors
___ Admits not having an answer
___ Admits losing control of discussion (How did we get here?)

Controversial issues

___ Selects topics on which a variety of opinion can be expected
___ Encourages expression of differences of opinion
___ Sets up situation in which students will have to think about both sides of an issue
___ Encourages students to challenge, cross question, evaluate one another
___ Accepts student point of view where there is legitimate variation in position
___ Supports the rights of speakers who hold minority or unpopular views
___ Attempts to mediate or resolve differences or conflicts among group members
___ When very different positions are taken, obtains temporary agreement on <u>part</u> of issue so discussion can continue
___ Opens two-member controversy to whole group
___ Encourages students to interact directly by asking students to comment on each other's remarks and/or by asking one student to respond directly to another
___ Refrains from introducing his own opinion to avoid biasing discussion
___ Presents his own opinion to enhance seriousness of discussion
___ Encourages students to challenge his expressed opinions
___ Encourages students to examine a variety of points of view before drawing conclusions or making judgments

Other:

Teaching through Questioning

Mechanics

___ Sees that everyone hears question and answer
___ Calls on individuals before question to alert
___ Asks group-oriented question, lets all think, then one answer
___ Calls on non-volunteers as well as volunteers
___ Allows time after question for formulation of good answers
___ Allows time after answer to consider it
___ Invites alternative or additional answers
___ Involves a large proportion of the class

Class atmosphere

___ Lets students know they are free not to respond
___ Makes it:
  ___ "safe" to speak
  ___ "safe" to be wrong
___ Holds attention of students who are not directly interacting with teacher
___ Allows students to respond to one another

Design of the questions

___ Questions are easily understood, clear in intent and precisely expressed
___ Asks "leading" questions which provide clues to appropriate strategy or way of organizing
___ Prompts with hints, rephrased or simplified questions
___ Asks questions which focus student attention on a particular relevant aspect of the matter at hand
___ Ask related questions in a series
___ Asks questions which require recall of information
___ Asks questions which require processing of information:
  ___ Grouping and classification
  ___ Compare and contrast
  ___ Specify cause and effect or other relationship
  ___ Analysis
  ___ Generate examples
___ Asks questions with more than one right answer
___ Asks students to apply information from reading or lecture
  ___ Selecting the information to be applied
  ___ Selecting the problem and letting student decide what is relevant
___ Asks questions which require student to generalize
  ___ to make inferences
  ___ to evaluate
___ Asks questions on matters of opinion, where any answer is right
___ Asks questions which encourage students to guess or hypothesize about the unknown or untested, to speculate or invent
___ Asks questions that relate to the experience of the student
___ Requires student to support answer with evidence or argument

Teaching through Questioning - continued

___ Requires student to specify standards or criteria when expressing judgments or making evaluative statements
___ Asks questions that go beyond facts
___ Asks questions that stimulate reflection beyond the class itself
___ Asks a variety of questions for different pedagogical purposes:
    ___ Emphasis
    ___ Practice (drill)
    ___ Self-awareness (student to realize he isn't getting it)
    ___ Attention
    ___ Variety, change of pace in classroom
    ___ Review

Reception of answers

___ Gives evidence of listening to answers, not just waiting to hear an expected answer
___ Rephrases an answer to be sure he understands
___ Tries to understand a divergent response rather than rejecting it
___ Asks for further clarification
___ Corrects misconceptions, sees that correct answer is brought out
___ Returns response to student for correction, clarification of thought, rewording of fuzzy statements
___ Gives reasons when rejecting an answer
___ Follows up short or inadequate answers with a probing response that requires student to extend or improve his answer
___ Accepts and acknowledges all answers ("I see what you mean," "Mmhm") or by reflecting
    ___ by clarifying
    ___ by summarizing
___ Responds directly rather than praising
___ Praises answer
    ___ Praises an answer selectively, finding some good part
    ___ Acknowledges the correct part of a partially correct answer and tries to get the incorrect part improved -- by the same person or another
    ___ Praises or corrects answers which can be judged by definition, custom, or empirical validation, <u>not</u> others
    ___ Accepts all responses but praises those closest to the standard more vigorously
___ Asks student to check a wrong answer against other known information or evidence
___ Reminds student of relevant known information or evidence
___ Recognizes student's right to his own opinion where question is a matter of opinion
___ Accepts the emotional content of an answer independent of its correctness
___ Responds by expressing his own ideas
___ Returns question to student to pin-point difficulties, begin to conceptualize solutions

Teaching through Questioning - continued

___ Encourages students to evaluate their own or one another's answers (What would happen if you did it that way?)
___ Allows, even encourages students to disagree
___ Accepts wild or far-fetched answers

Others: